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## INTRODUCTION TO PART ONE: A PSYCHO-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON READING

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This first part explores some of the major ideas underpinning a psycho-linguistic perspective on reading. It begins with transcripts of the interviews conducted with Ann Browne and Teresa Grainger. Before picking up on and discussing some of the recommendations of our two scholars, I will offer a brief historical tour of the events and circumstances that led to the rise to prominence of a perspective that defined reading as a problem-solving activity. I will discuss what became known in the US as the 'whole language movement' and what in the UK was termed 'real books'. The writings of the original proponents of these ideas will be analysed and the positive contribution that this approach to reading makes will be considered. The difficulties and criticisms associated with this perspective on literacy will also be signalled and this discussion leads into Part Two. Throughout, connections will be made to the thinking of the two reading scholars, Ann Browne and Teresa Grainger, and to the classroom practices associated with this school of thought.

## ANN BROWNE'S OBSERVATIONS, SUGGESTIONS AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

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### Profile of Ann Browne

Dr Ann Browne is a senior lecturer in education at the University of East Anglia where she works with trainee and practising teachers on primary language and literacy courses. Her main research interests are in English and Early Years Education. Her publications include four books about early years literacy: *Helping Children to Write* (1993), *Developing Language and Literacy 3-8* (1996), *A Practical Guide to Teaching Reading in the Early Years* (1998) and *Teaching Writing at Key Stage 1 and Before* (1999).

What follows is an edited version of a face-to-face interview I conducted with Ann in November 2001.

KATHY HALL (KH): First I want to thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this project, for studying the video of Stephen and for giving me this interview. Perhaps we can start by reminding ourselves of the four questions – the first concerning what you think you know about Stephen, based on his reading and retelling and based on the very brief profile you got of him, the second concerning what more you would like to know about him, the third issue focusing on your suggestions for taking him forward, and finally, I would like to ask you about the theoretical perspectives you bring to bear on your interpretation of Stephen and how to help him. Shall we start with what you feel the evidence tells you about Stephen as a reader?

Ann Browne (AB): Yes. He seemed very uncertain selecting the book, he grabbed the first book, *Funny Bones*, first of all, and didn't look at the others. Then his attention was drawn to those others and he grabbed one, the one that he subsequently read, *Bear*. He didn't look for authors, didn't look at the blurb, didn't look at the titles and, when asked to explain his first choice, he said he thought the book looked funny. So he may have been familiar with that book as it is a very familiar book for young children but you know the style of the illustrations would have given that and you wouldn't have to do much analysis to work out that this is a humorous book. So I think he was missing out a whole lot of strategies for choosing books. He didn't predict the content of the book at all, he didn't say 'Oh, it's about a bear', or 'I think this is about skeletons.' So he wasn't connecting to things that he was interested in, so very limited in that way, suggesting that he was very inexperienced at selecting books on his own. But this may be something you'd want to know more about – how much experience he's had at selecting books and making book choices and what is his knowledge of picture books and authors. And by Year 3 in fact you would expect it should be quite extensive and, looking at the environment he was sitting in, which was a very positive literacy environment, you'd think he would have this but I had questions about that.

Then in the introduction to the reading, the part where the teacher was reading, here Stephen was really focused. And it was really lovely to see that, he was intently looking at the words and apparently intently listening to the teacher's reading and that suggested to me that he was very interested in books and reading and he wanted to know what was in this book. And that was very positive.

Then we had the next bit when he joined in. He was invited to join in and he had sufficient confidence to join in which was again very positive to see, and he had interest, so that reinforced that intennes with which he'd been following the reading.

Here I started to analyse what he could do in terms of the processes and skills of reading. He had a good sight vocabulary of simple words, simple function words like 'it', 'was', and 'I', and mostly he got 'the'; he muddled it up a bit with 'she' but he mostly got it. Those little words like 'might' and 'be' – he was fine on all of those. He made some use of phonic strategies, for example, he got 'definitely' by sounding that out and partly he used it with syllabification as well, he was chunking it as well as using individual sounds. He was able on occasions to self-correct, not very frequently, but he did it, so again suggesting that he was wanting to make meaning but also suggesting maybe that he was wanting to get the words right which I think was quite a preoccupation of his. He substituted words which retained the meaning very closely like keeping the parts of speech, so he was using his knowledge of syntax. Again an example was 'did' and 'does' in line 55 and 'keep' and 'kept' later on in

the reading so very positive in that he could draw on a number of reading strategies.

What he didn't use were the picture cues, the illustrations, the teacher pointed those out to him on a couple of occasions I think, so he wasn't using all the available cues that were there for him. He also read very slowly and that's what suggested to me that maybe he had a preoccupation with trying to get everything absolutely right. So the question then is, was he understanding what he was reading?

Then the next section of the reading is the retelling and I think at this point it was clear that he hadn't really understood what he'd read. He'd missed the subtleties of the text. He hadn't understood that this was a story about a real bear, that Sophie was getting the blame for something the bear had done. His teacher supported his retelling but even so there were quite a lot of misunderstandings. So that supposition that I had about his pre-occupation with decoding is confirmed for me by this.

So then taking all of that evidence from the selection to the retelling what I conclude is that he lacked confidence as a reader. He was hesitant and concerned with the words in the text; maybe that was interfering with his understanding. He liked humour and he wanted to be able to read, whether that was because he wanted to be able to read or whether he wanted to please his teacher, again I'd be uncertain about that. So that's a summary about what I think he could do.

KH: *Yes, thank you very much and now that brings us to what other evidence you would like to have about him. What more you would like to know about him?*

AB: I suppose I had lots of questions as you always do about an unknown child and these are not in any particular order but rather were generated by watching the tape. I'd like to know how he would tackle simpler texts because actually this one was quite a demanding text, it was a subtle story, it wasn't very obvious, there were undertones within it. And so I would like to know how he would tackle a simpler text which would, if you like, demand less understanding and have less words to be concerned about.

I'd like to know what kind of opportunities he has in school to respond to texts, to express ideas about books, to discuss books. I'd like to know what provision there is and how he participates within that in the classroom. I'd like to know what opportunities there are for him to read texts that he enjoys, that have a connection with his interest, with his life, and I think, in what you wrote, the teacher uses reading schemes as well as picture books for the children. But where he is on his choices between these would be interesting to know, and whether he has opportunities to select books himself or if the books are selected for him.

I'd like to know more about him as a child, about his interests, whether he ever reads books that are related to his interests, and maybe other reading

material, maybe outside school, whether he reads comics, magazines about computers, cars or whatever he might be interested in. I'd also like to know how he reads familiar books, books that had been shared with him or prepared before he reads them, whether he then understands them better. And about how much practice at reading he gets in and out of school, although there seems plenty of opportunities within the classroom, and his mother I think was particularly interested in his education, but what in reality all that means in terms of time and experience of reading he gets.

And I'd like to know why he wants to read. Does he understand what reading is for, or does he want to read to please his teacher, or to please his parents? What is his understanding about reading, about the purposes of reading, the pleasures of reading? Does he see reading models at home, the out of school experiences? Does he see it as a purposeful activity? Is it presented to him as purposeful and happening beyond the confines of the classroom? So there was just a brainstorm of things, that I'd like to know a bit more about.

KH: *Thanks, Ann. Is it okay to move on now to some of the suggestions you have for his teacher?*

AB: Yes, well just before that, I thought that there were positive things about his teacher that I would like to mention, that are important to mention. This is especially important if you give a huge list of things that might be done, it suggests there were huge gaps in what's provided and I would want to acknowledge that there were positive things. His teacher was very warm and encouraging with him, and she did respond to what he was doing, and she noticed what he wasn't doing as well, so hence pointing out the illustrations, reading words for him, and from your notes there is a rich reading curriculum in the classroom so lots of good things going on.

But what do I think could be provided then? It would be important to think through the question: what does Stephen need, what precisely does he need? Rather than just a general reading programme, he needs a programme that's matched to his particular needs, and that relates to the sorts of things that he's not doing so well, which is not understanding, and not having a large sight vocabulary for his age. For example, he could be encouraged to revisit books that he knows. He needs his confidence building up in reading, so that he's less stuck on deciphering every word, so if there were familiar books, maybe that would be helpful. He could make his own books that were of interest to him, that again would give him confidence when he was reading them, because he'd have written them himself.

He could read with friends because he seems to be quite sociable, in that he has a close-knit group of friends. Have reading partners and work with

friends, work with friends at the computer on reading and on writing. Have opportunities to respond to books maybe in group reading, but maybe in projects on author studies, collections of books in the classroom.

Teach him book selection strategies, help him to select his own books and encourage him to keep a list of books he has selected. Look at the choices he makes and see whether there is a pattern, then see how you could use that to pick more books that would interest him or take him elsewhere in his reading. So find out what interests him really, match books to his interests and ability, because that book was difficult.

Provide specific phonic teaching matched to his needs so, for example, on line 143 there was the 'oo' sound and the long vowel sounds in 146 that he didn't seem confident with, so there would be two things you could be quite specific about in relation to phonics teaching. Encourage him to guess when he's reading, encourage him to guess at words that fit the context, so they're not random guesses, encourage him really to take a chance, to speed him up, and to use the context of what he's reading. Enlarge his sight vocabulary, start to push him on beyond the functional simple words through games like lotto, snap, and computer games. Writing would help there too.

Provide introductions to books for him. Ensure that the title is looked at, that the content of the book is predicted, and that the author is noted. Ask him, for example, if he knows any other stories by this author. Ensure that the blurb is looked at before the reading begins, so that he's in the frame of mind for reading, so he's a bit familiar with what might happen, before he embarks on any reading.

Other things you might consider are using tapes with a friend so he gets the experience of complete stories, retelling stories using tapes and story props, taking tapes of books home, seeing if you can find an author that interests him, basing cross-curricular activities around a book, which would then provide opportunities for him to revisit books and become confident with books. Build up a little core of books that he's familiar with and feels strongly about. Read with him, do more of what the teacher was doing at the beginning of the tape, so paired reading with an adult would be good. This could be with a classroom assistant, a parent or a volunteer.

I would find out what he reads at home. As a hunch, because he said he likes humour, joke books and comics might be a good starting point for some reading material for him. Writing a joke book could be a way in to the making of a book for him.

Challenge his understanding of books so when he's asked to talk about a book he's read, if he's misunderstood, challenge that, in a positive way obviously, perhaps saying 'But I don't think that happened', 'Why do you think that happened?' etc. so that he's really focusing on the meaning. Demonstrate the use of illustrations, perhaps in shared reading activities, so those were just again a brainstorm of ideas.

KH: *Thanks very much, Ann. Can we change tack just a little bit now and move away from the helpful, practical suggestions to the thinking and the theory underlying all those observations and the suggestions you offered his teacher. I'm thinking particularly of your own work and the major influences on your own thinking about reading development.*

AB: I don't know whether to start off with the people who influenced me or with where I start when I'm thinking about children and learning, or both.

KH: *Yes, I like the idea of starting with the children and their learning and how you would want to progress learning?*

AB: Okay, right. I think it's important to try and understand how learners learn and to have that as an overview, and then take how learners learn and try and put yourself in the place of the child learning. So, thinking in a general sense then, you have to have a reason for learning; you learn most effectively if there is a purpose. Children need to know what it is they're learning to do, so that they're clear on what it is. They need to believe that this learning that they're undertaking makes a difference to them, and to their lives, that it adds something to what they've got already. Relevance is important. So that is really a starting point. Did Stephen really understand what reading is for and does he really know what he's embarking on, and does he know what reading could be to him? This brings in the question really of what his exposure to reading outside school is like and whether it is clear to him what the function of reading is, so that would link in with those observations.

Then there is respecting children as rational curious beings who are always eager to learn, but knowing that they are also eager to please. Young children are so eager to please, and this can get in the way almost of them learning, and you're not quite sure what it is, whether they are eager to learn or eager to please. All children have an intense ability to learn and a belief that they can do it.

I would always emphasize that reading is one of the language areas, and how we learn lessons about reading development from how children learn to speak and communicate, and acknowledging again that ability they have to communicate in so many ways and to take lessons from oral language learning. So consequently the importance of believing that they will learn to read and they will learn to write if they can see these activities as communicative activities. That would then take me into what is clearly, and what has been a big influence on me, which is the work of Smith and Goodman and the whole-language approach. Yes, they did influence me terrifically, and continue to do so. That again would link in with how I started to look at Stephen's reading and look at the way he used context and syntax and look at the other strategies. So that whole miscue idea and the retelling. What is the understanding – that's the whole purpose of

reading; it isn't reading unless you've understood what you've read, and Goodman and Smith so emphasized this.

And then I think other people like Gordon Wells and his work on oral language – that would link, too: what he was saying about how well children learn language in real contexts and where parents encourage learning in a natural and purposeful way. It's so important to provide models for children. So you have to think of real contexts for this child to read in, i.e. the social dimensions, working with friends, and the choice of resources that would be more real to him. And this relates to what was loosely associated with Liz Waterland – but she didn't start it off – that is the apprenticeship approach. Here we have the adult and child learning together, and the child learning, in a supported way, from an adult and the child becoming more and more competent and taking over, and taking more responsibility when they become confident and competent at what they're doing.

Don Holdaway was an influence too. He saw learning to read as a social activity, one where you made links between learning at home, learning at school, the idea of shared reading. And again the process being very supported – giving children lots of ways into reading, giving them a set of books that they are familiar with reading, letting them read, supported by other children, by adults, returning to books to read them again. And learning the skills within the context of reading the whole or complete text, and a text that is an interesting text, an important text and an enjoyable text, one that's been selected pretty carefully for its child-appeal but also for its quality.

Hennetta Dombey has influenced me too in her work in trying always to put phonics, particularly, within a context of all the other things that need to go on. She's particularly good I think at saying 'Don't dismiss phonics, phonics has a place but it always needs to occur within a context. Yes, I think she has got a very balanced view of phonics and a very realistic one and you'd never want to dismiss any of the strategies that might help children to read anyway. So it's important, I think, to recognize that there is a number of strategies that we need to teach children. And she has been very sane and good about that.

And then at a more theoretical level the work of Stanovitch would have influenced me. However, he can be very dismissive of whole-language exponents, even though he very often writes that he's not being critical of them. But I find him being very critical of them, somewhat dismissive even. But his thinking on top-down and bottom-up models is useful. His notion of an interactive model of the reading process, that is that all the strategies have to work together, and you don't need to start at a top-down or bottom-up but you acknowledge that all of them are important, has been useful. Although I said he's very critical of whole language, when he talks about his models then I think he brings everything together, sounds a bit of a paradox there, actually, that.

**KH:** *Do you mind if I ask you something which I didn't really plan but it just arises from what you're saying about integrating top-down and bottom-up models of reading. I was just wondering what you thought about the National Literacy Strategy in the light of those possible tensions between bottom-up and top-down approaches.*

**AB:** I really have mixed feelings about this, Kathy, actually, you see, as I think you can work with the Literacy Strategy if you want to, because of the division into text, sentence and word level. You can use the text in pretty much the way, say, Don Holdaway was saying. And if you have an understanding of the reading processes, then you can select your objectives in a way that still makes a very meaningful approach to the teaching of reading. But I think that, sadly, at Key Stage 1 and before, the emphasis within the Literacy Strategy is on phonics and on the word-level work. There are more word-level objectives and that is pushed as if it's the solution to the development of reading and writing. But if you ignore those directives we're getting and just look at the framework and you ask 'How can I make this into a sensible teaching programme?' then you can make it work, I think. Maybe that's a bit of an answer really – how can I make it into something? Maybe you shouldn't have to make it into something.

If you think about the range of texts that children have to engage with, that could be wonderful, and the real push that there is now on poetry within the Strategy, and that's really exciting, could be exciting. But it's become reduced really because of the word level. I think what's so sad about the NLS is that there was a real opportunity to improve practitioners' understanding of the processes of reading and this hasn't happened. It has just become a mechanical thing, this is what you do and a question of this is how you do it. And so I think many people haven't had the time or maybe even the knowledge to be able to use it in a way that enables them to teach in a more holistic way. I suppose there are all sorts of contradictions in there, aren't there? What's happening is I don't see my students – and I think my students learn from the teachers they are working with – I don't see them trying to understand what their children are doing; they're more preoccupied with what they have to teach the children, so it's become a teaching thing, rather than a learning thing. I worry about that.

Increasingly I think it is the lack of understanding of the advocated teaching strategies that interferes with the success of the Strategy. Shared reading, shared writing and guided writing could be very powerful teaching and learning strategies. They have been in the past, but I don't think there is sufficient understanding of them – why they are powerful and how they can support and extend children's learning – and so they are not being used to best effect by many teachers. If they were used in the way suggested by Holdaway and exemplified in the CLPE book on shared writing, and if

guided writing was seen as an opportunity to engage with children and support their discoveries about the processes of writing, particularly those relating to composition, i.e. like Graves' idea of a group writing conference, they would be far more powerful. As it is, all these methods of organizing literacy teaching are often limited to teaching children about phonics and spelling and have often become an end in themselves. They are filled with missed opportunities. Children are spending too much time on the bits and pieces of reading and writing and are getting bored with the routines. They are being taught the skills and are not aware of the joys and uses of literacy and consequently many of them do not see the point of becoming readers and writers. When children feel this, there is the danger that they will fail to learn or develop their abilities beyond what is acceptable in school or use and enjoy their skills outside school.

KH: *Well thanks very much for that. Is there anything else I should ask or anything you want to say?*

AB: Well, there is actually. What I was thinking about as I was driving here today, Kathy, and thinking about this meeting, is that one of the influences on me is the literature about writing. And how writing develops, and seeing the developmental aspects of writing and then linking that with reading, and that makes it very real to me. Reading work like that of Ferrero and Teberosky, and seeing that developmental continuum of language learning which is very visible in writing and then knowing that there is a developmental continuum in reading. Development in reading is supported, well, it's imitative and supported as it is in writing and then the reader becomes more and more competent and more and more familiar with the way the writing system works and that would have affected how I see the development of reading.

KH: *Do you mean that they become more and more competent in all the modes of language when you say that?*

AB: Particularly connecting their development in reading with their development in writing. The feedback they get and the support that they get and the teaching that they get that is targeted to what they don't know yet but yet the support is there for what they do know and working in that way with children is so important, I think.

KH: *And writing is very much your area of interest too, isn't it?*

AB: Yes it is.

KH: *Ann, again, thank you very much.*

## TERESA GRAINGER'S OBSERVATIONS, SUGGESTIONS AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

### Profile of Teresa Grainger

Teresa Grainger is a principal lecturer in education at Canterbury Christ Church University College, where she runs the MA in Literacy and Language and coordinates the PGCE primary English programme. Her research interests are focused on the language arts: storytelling, poetry, drama and literature as well as pedagogy. Her books include *Traditional Storytelling in the Primary Classroom* (1997), *Resourcing Drama 5-8* (2001a) and *Resourcing Drama 8-14* (2001b) both with Mark Cremon and *Inclusive Educational Practice: Literacy* (2000) which she wrote with Janet Tod. Teresa was president of the United Kingdom Reading Association (2001-02) and is editor of the refereed UKRA journal *Reading: Literacy and Language*.

This is an edited version of a telephone conversation I conducted with Teresa Grainger in January 2002.

KATHY HALL (KH): *Thanks, Teresa, for agreeing to do this interview by telephone. I'm aware that you couldn't access the visual information, that you are basing your observations and suggestions only on the transcript and the background notes. What do you think we know about Stephen from this limited evidence of him as a reader?*

TERESA GRAINGER (TG): I can't see his hesitations. I'm focusing more on what he's saying, what he's doing with words. I don't think this

invalidates what I'm saying but you've got to decide as you're doing the project. I do know the book – my children have it here at home. But in any case there are three things that I think we do know about him, things that I think are important. He's the oldest child, first son, and he's a sibling. In terms of his personality he is someone who is not ebullient.

Secondly, we do know some of his reading history. We know for example that he didn't achieve Level 2 at the end of Key Stage 1 reading assessment so he is not operating at the level expected of most children of this age. He seems to lack confidence in himself as a reader. He expressed a fear of not knowing the words before the recording. I was interested in this expression of anxiety – he was afraid that he wouldn't know the words. He is word-conscious then, perhaps, and he is hesitant.

Thirdly, through the miscue exercise you can see some of his skills. He's reliant on phonics, I think, and on segmentation and blending within that. He is also very reliant on the teacher – there were very many words supplied for him. And this is where I might have got more information from the visual evidence as his face may well tell a lot about him – whether he was trying to have a go for example. He struggled with some of the words and the teacher frequently supplied them. Sometimes she said 'sound it out' but mostly she supplied it. I think we know he's become over-reliant on particular skills and uses these at the expense of others. Yet he had a good understanding of the story and did seem to engage with it. He knew it was 'in the dark' and he knew what was going on. And this rather surprised me as I thought it was at odds with his reading. So in the retelling he does seem to have grasped the meaning but he doesn't have the confidence to have a go when he's stuck on a word, he just wants to be supported – he waits for the teacher to supply the word. These were the points that struck me in relation to what we know from the evidence.

KH: *Thank you, Teresa. Can you tell me what evidence you'd like to have; what would you like to know about him as a reader?*

TG: I'd like to know more about his reading habits. I'd like to know if he reads at home. I'd like to know what he does in class during quiet reading time. Does he read or does he fiddle around? Does he flick over the pages? Does he look at the pictures? What are his preferences – does he have any and we don't know that. What kind of reading material does he like if he's given a choice? What authors would he know or choose? Would he go for an Inkpen or a Burningham? If there's a reliance on schemes in the school, and I gather there is, then what level of the scheme is he on? How conscious is he of where he is in relation to others in the class – would he choose a book to be seen to be the same as his mates in the class who may not now be on the scheme?

And in terms of his reading record I'd like to know what his self-assessment of his own reading is. I'd like to know if he really has a desire to read. Does he enjoy reading?

Although he retells as requested, he does so because his teacher asks. He seems eager to please his teacher. He's assiduous, he reads the words as she asks. Also the teacher does a retell rather than a reflection and a retell – there is little discussion and debate. He remembered the story, to use her key word which gives us an insight into what she thinks you should do after the reading, that is remember it in order. She draws attention to picture cues but she draws attention to sounds at least three times. The remembering and the focus on sounds seemed to be most important to her. There was a tendency on her part, then, to attend to the 'small shapes' rather than attend to the bigger picture.

KH: *Could you say a bit more about that, Teresa, what you mean by 'small shapes'?*

TG: A couple of times the teacher draws his attention to the pictures but mostly she draws his attention to the words, the sounds of the words and so on. She tends to concentrate on the 'small shapes'. But to be fair to her she's doing a miscue analysis, and in a strict miscue analysis one might offer no support at all. And this may have been a conundrum for her. She seems to have combined an ordinary one-to-one reading encounter, which I know it isn't, with a miscue – all the time aware you are videoing her. She has a tendency to say 'What word is that?' – and I'm not saying that's not appropriate, but she might occasionally have highlighted words within words. Now of course she may have done that. I know I can gesture with my finger to the visual cues without literally saying 'Look at that.' Then the child feels he has made the decision himself – but as I didn't see them reading together, I'm less confident about this point. Equally she doesn't stop to discuss the book, she doesn't interrupt to engage with the meaning of the text – now this is what I would call a 'big shape'. I know it was a test situation but her inclination was only to use two elements – prompt for visuals or prompt for sounds. And she didn't encourage him to recognize parts of words. She didn't encourage him to read on to help him get the word. She's probably thinking 'This is a miscue analysis and I mustn't interrupt.' The bit about the peanut butter was great, now this kind of interaction could have happened during the reading although one doesn't want too many breaks as this would interrupt the story too much.

The other thing in relation to this is the affirmation – his teacher is good at affirming and encouraging him. But I think she overdoes the 'good boy'; she says this several times, especially when he sounds a word out. I think you might want to extend such interruptions into a moment's discussion

– ‘Do you think he would bite? I wouldn’t like it if a teddy bear bit me etc. Do you think he did bite? Let’s read on and find out.’ That kind of thing makes a difference to the next bit of the text I think, and I think it’s better than ‘good boy’ as you create the desire to know rather than only affirming that he has read words correctly. And I have to say ‘good boy’ sounds rather patronizing to me anyway. But then I know it’s easy to be critical when it’s not you. So really the point I’m making is that I would suggest the teacher might pay more attention to the meanings, interpretations, rather than focus too narrowly on the accuracy of the words. In other words I’d recommend more emphasis on the ‘big shapes’ and less emphasis on the ‘small shapes’.

KH: *Okay, thanks for that.*

TG: Getting back to what else I’d like to know about Stephen. I’d like to know what his attitude to reading is. He might well sit in ‘read aloud’ time and be an avid listener, or he might fiddle with his shoe laces. I’d like to know a lot more about his commitment to reading. So I would like to know more than ‘his word’ as it were, which I think is what we mainly got in the miscue transcript. I would want to see his behaviour, what he actually does, and I’d like to know about his interest in reading at home.

I’d also like to know what the parental support is like. Does he read at home? Does he read independently? Does he read to his sibling? Does he read aloud? It sounds as if his mum is helpful and supportive but this doesn’t always mean parents know how to support in the best way. Is she asking him to read to her or is she reading with him, are they reading together? She’s a supportive mum clearly and I’d like to know what kind of guidance parents are offered by the school in this regard.

Last thing I’d like to know – and this probably should be the first thing I mentioned – that is what he is like as a person. I’d like to know about his personality, his interests, his tendencies, what gets him going. I believe strongly that we can hook children in who aren’t yet capable and committed or confident if we work through their interests, by finding the subject matter that ensnares them in some way. Not all children are going to be confident to pick up, say, a Harry Potter book and read it, but what I would at least want is that they would come to the idea of a book in your hand as not being a negative thing. If he has rollerblades, a skateboard and so on then perhaps he’d read material about his hobbies; would he look at a catalogue or a book about his interests? In this way one could tempt him into reading via his interests and begin to get a handle on the kinds of narrative texts he might enjoy.

KH: *So what do you think his teacher should do to advance him as a reader?*

TG: I think the first thing to do is put this evidence alongside other knowledge about him as a reader along the lines I was suggesting just now. A miscue is not enough of course, it only really looks at the cueing systems although it should encompass comprehension and response as well. The other sorts of evidence should come from a reading conference, from observations of him in the classroom, talks with his parents – all of this to get a bigger picture of him. Then one could devise a plan for him and indeed for others who may have a similar profile. The teacher should develop a series of specific aspects to take him forward. She might draw on the support of a classroom assistant here, his parents, herself working in a one-to-one with him where she can, but this will not be so easy. So she might group him with some others who also need the same kind of support and here I would make use of guided reading.

However, a point I would emphasize is that the specific support planned for him should be set within a wider culture of language and literacy. I think there’s a danger in thinking that the specifics can be done separately – this work should be integrated into a wider programme of literacy development that prioritizes meaning in a literature-rich classroom environment.

In relation to the specifics it would be sensible to use the key pedagogies of shared and guided reading in particular, and within these the teacher would need to extend his cueing systems. He doesn’t seem to be aware of the cueing systems he’s using. And I think this could be done in shared and guided reading contexts where peers can discuss the cueing system they use. I’m not suggesting he needs that terminology but I do think these kinds of sessions can develop metalinguistic awareness. Provide opportunities for children to articulate what they do when they’re stuck – ‘I read on to the end of the line when I’m stuck on a word’ etc. He’s not looking for words within words, he’s not guessing what’s coming next in the text. Sometimes he made errors as if he wasn’t sure what the sense of the sentence was. And this would need to be tackled in those kinds of sessions where children talk about what they do as they read and are specifically taught strategies.

I think his teacher might develop his sight words more thoroughly – he’s not using graphic knowledge well. I would suggest lots of games for this.

My sense is that he’s probably come through a strong phonics diet and that’s fine, but he doesn’t know what to do when he meets a word that is phonetically irregular, he wants to be told what it is. And as I’ve said before, he is preoccupied with the words – he hasn’t struck out on his own; he’s not making his own guesses using a range of context and visual and semantic cues; and here he needs to be supported a lot more. He needs a wider range of strategies for tackling the words *and* he needs to know he is doing it. What I mean here is that in the guided reading sessions she needs to help him become aware that he’s been taught how to read forward, to check the picture cues and so on, that he can do those things when



he comes to an unknown word; then he can practise these strategies at home. It's as if 'knowing' the words is the only part of the reading process for him.

What I think his teacher should be aiming for is for him to become increasingly independent as a reader. To get more confidence he may well need highly patterned language like one finds in the Dr Seuss books – that he can read independently, and have some fun with. He might be encouraged to engage in poetic performance. He could, for example, work with one or two friends on putting a poem on tape, using expressive voices, and interpreting the poem in some way. This could involve using highly patterned verse, which would give him the freedom to read some text well. Equally he could tell stories onto tapes. He's not likely to want to be in the story chair himself and be a teller, but if he's working in a group and he knows he's going to have a part to play, a role to perform with his mates, he might begin to engage more with the meaning, with fluency and expression.

I believe strongly the teacher needs to read aloud to him (and to the class), and develop his awareness of authors. Reading partnerships would also be good for him – where, for example, the Year 5s partner with the Year 3s. This would be excellent support for him because he certainly doesn't want to be placed in a position where he is exposed. This arrangement benefits everyone but it especially benefits the weaker readers. All of this should be happening, I think, within a wider context of a classroom that celebrates authors, that emphasizes reading and writing for meaningful purposes. The 'additional literacy support' could be used for his specific difficulties but none of this will work unless it's set within a context of meaningful engagement with literature profiled in the classroom.

KH: *What kind of theoretical framework do you draw on in making all these recommendations?*

TG: I take a Vygotskian view of learning – a social interactionist perspective. The learner must appreciate the purpose of what he's doing if he is going to develop as an independent reader. If he doesn't understand the purposes and have his own purposes for reading, he's only going to continue to develop in those contexts in which he's being supported. I'm also very influenced by reader response theory, and the author–reader–text triangle as well as the work done at the Institute of Education (London) (e.g. James Britton, Harold Rosen, and Margaret Meek) and Donald Graves, the Goodmans, and Frank Smith. I'm interested in the author–reader–text triangle. I would locate myself within the whole-language movement but I would also say that within the whole-language movement there's a range of people and views. For example, I think it's important to get a balance between implicit and explicit teaching/learning – I'd like children to discuss

their cueing systems. I don't think Goodman himself suggests children discuss reading strategies, and the NLS supports such a stance. Teachers don't have to own this knowledge – we can share it and I think there is much scope for the use of retrospective miscue analysis – this helps children make their own independent moves forward. For me reading is a problem-solving business and I believe children need to see this, to self-correct etc. But to bother to problem solve, to bother to self-correct, you've got to know there's meaning to be had, and you've got to value this. So we come back to the purpose of the enterprise and how children learn this through engagement and interaction. After all, if reading is anything it's thinking about meaning.

We need to make sure that we are integrating not only the modes of language, listening, speaking, reading and writing, but also developing children's skills, understanding, knowledge and attitudes. Okay, naming the phonemes might be a significant piece of knowledge to have, but without a wider framework we're in danger of developing the skills at the expense of the fundamental enterprise of making meaning. We can easily increase knowledge about language but we need to ensure that children are able to make good use of this knowledge in creative applications and for their own purposes, and in my opinion this is not what's happening nationally at the moment – at least in the case of writing. The holistic development of the individual is important and we shouldn't neglect it.

KH: *Many thanks, Teresa. I very much appreciate the time you've taken to study the evidence and to talk to me.*

this particular stance. Psycho-linguistics is the interdisciplinary field of psychology and linguistics in which language behaviour is studied.

### **Whence the psycho-linguistic perspective?**

The linguist Noam Chomsky (1965) revolutionized the study of language when he demonstrated that comprehending language was not a matter of linking up the various meanings of adjacent words. This kind of linear processing was the basis of the behaviourist psychologists' accounts of language comprehension that had prevailed for some fifty years before. Children did not simply imitate the language they heard, Chomsky suggested. Language was far too complex to be acquired in this way. He postulated a nativist view of language acquisition in suggesting that humans are innately predisposed to acquire the language of their environment. Children naturally acquire the language of the home by sheer exposure, he observed, and they become good users of oral language long before they start school. Moreover, they become proficient in oral language without direct instruction. In Chomsky's view, humans had to be equipped with some cognitive device for working out the complex rules of language – how else could you explain this remarkable achievement?

Many in the field of reading, especially psychologists, then began to wonder if Chomsky's observations about oral language could also be applied to written language. This was how a psycho-linguistic position on reading came about. While Chomsky had argued that children were innately equipped to learn language, psycho-linguists went on to demonstrate that children were active learners who worked out the rules of language for themselves. When a child says 'I ate my dinner', or 'I can see two sheep', s/he is inferring that you put an event in the past by adding 'ed' to the verb and that you make a noun plural by adding 's'. So mistakes in their oral language give insights into the way children were inferring the rules. Could there be parallels in written language? Do children learn how to read and to write in much the same way as they acquired oral language? Could learning to read and to write be natural?

### **Reading as natural and as a constructive or problem-solving activity**

These questions exercised several literacy researchers but perhaps few more so than Kenneth and Yetta Goodman and Frank Smith. Kenneth Goodman argued that the mistakes, or what he termed 'miscues', children make while reading are better viewed as information about the comprehending process the reader is going through than mistakes to be eliminated. They should be

## **READING AS A PROBLEM-SOLVING ACTIVITY**

### **Introduction**

How would we describe some of the theoretical underpinnings of the observations and suggestions of our scholars so far? Each of them highlighted some of the theorists and theories that have informed their judgments and understandings of the reading process. Each of them drew on a range of literature and thinking about language and about learning. It is certainly not my intention here to suggest that these scholars can be conveniently pigeon-holed or categorized into a particular camp – if anything, this book shows just how futile, crude and simplistic such an approach would be. You might well wonder, then, at the title of Part One, which does suggest a particular perspective on literacy. My explanation is this. You can usefully consider the observations and suggestions of our scholars against some of the major perspectives that have informed the field of reading. You can begin to detect the relative impact on their thinking of these various perspectives and how they differ in the emphasis they place on different theoretical principles. You can begin to work out what theories seem to be heavily influencing their ideas and suggestions, and by so doing you can begin to formulate your own theoretical perspective which, I suggest, is very likely to draw on more than one or even two major perspectives. This is perfectly reasonable, given that all these perspectives are attempting to describe the same process. This part of the book looks at reading through a psycho-linguistic lens and it refers back to our scholars' suggestions from time to time in order to trace the influence on them of

viewed, he argued, as indicators of how the reader was making sense of the text. He concluded that, because children were better able to read words in story contexts than in word lists, they were using context knowledge to support comprehension and word identification. It's important to note that reading, according to Goodman, depends not only on the text but also on what the reader brings to the text in the form of previous knowledge, not just of language, but knowledge of the world itself. He says:

Reading is a constructive process: both the text and the meaning are constructed by the reader. That means that at any point in time there are two or more texts during reading: the published text and the reader's text. In the transactions, both the reader and the text are changed. The reader's knowledge and schemata are changed, and the text is changed as the reader constructs it to fit expectations and world knowledge. In this emerging consensus, what the reader brings to the text is as important as anything in the text. Comprehension always depends on the reader's knowledge, beliefs, schemata, and language ability.

(Goodman 1992: 358)

Overall, emphasis is placed on the meaning that learners themselves want to communicate.

His close observation and analysis of actual reading behaviour led him to describe reading as 'a psycho-linguistic guessing game' (Goodman 1967). Here he laid out the elements of language that he thought readers used to construct meaning from texts. He suggested that readers draw on three cue systems simultaneously to make sense of text: graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic cues. He said:

The readers of English I have studied utilize three cue systems simultaneously. The starting point is graphic in reading and we may call one cue system 'graphophonic'. The reader responds to graphic sequences and may utilize the correspondence between the graphic and phonological systems of his English dialect. . . . The second cue system the readers uses is 'syntactic'. The reader using pattern markers such as function words and inflectional suffixes as cues recognizes and predicts and structures. . . . The third cue system is 'semantic'. In order to derive meaning from language, the language user must be able to provide semantic input. This is not simply a question of meaning for words but the much larger question of the reader having sufficient experience and conceptual background to feed into the reading process so that he can make sense out of what he's reading. . . .

(Goodman 1973: 25-6)

By using all these cue systems readers could minimize uncertainty about unknown words and meanings. Since readers are viewed to be naturally

motivated to make sense of texts, Goodman saw no reason to distinguish between a word-identification phase and a comprehension phase in reading nor to isolate any single cue system for separate training or development. He said 'We can study how each one (cue system) works in reading and writing, but they can't be isolated for instruction without creating non-language abstractions' (Goodman 1986: 38-9).

Similarly, Frank Smith's *Understanding Reading* (1971) argued that reading was not something that you are taught, but rather something you learned to do as a consequence of belonging to a literate society and he postulated that there were no special prerequisites to learning to read. He said 'The function of teachers is not so much to "teach" reading as to help children read' (1971: 3). For him, you learn to read by reading and you learn to write by writing. In line with Goodman's notion of reading as a psycho-linguistic guessing game, Smith suggested that reading was a matter of making informed predictions about a text based on what readers already knew about how language works (syntactic and semantic knowledge) and what they knew about the world (semantic knowledge). His idea was that the reader develops hunches or hypotheses about upcoming words in a text and then confirms what the word is by sampling only a few features of the visual display. He advanced the controversial idea that reading was only incidentally visual – he minimized the role that graphic information plays in reading, saying:

The more difficulty a reader has with reading, the more he relies on the visual information; this statement applies to both the fluent reader and the beginner. In each case, the cause of the difficulty is inability to make full use of syntactic and semantic redundancy, of nonvisual sources of information.

(Smith 1971: 221)

And two years later he reiterated the secondary importance of visual information in saying 'It is clear that the better reader barely looks at the individual words on the page' (Smith 1973: 190). By nonvisual sources he meant readers' prior knowledge of the context and of the way language works. He argued for the importance of these sources of information so readers could make good predictions and so they would not have to rely too heavily on visual information, thus losing sight of the meaning.

Even more controversially, Smith (1973: 105) claimed that 'readers do not use (and do not need to use) the alphabetic principle of decoding to sound in order to learn to identify words'. To reiterate Smith's position: in coming to the text with expectations and a disposition to predict, readers sample just enough of it to confirm or reject their predictions. As will be demonstrated below, this take on reading and, in particular, the status Smith (and others) attributed to graphophonic knowledge have since been challenged and found to be inaccurate.

Basically psycho-linguists, like the Goodmans and Smith, view writing as paralleling oral language, differing only in mode. In 1980 Yetta Goodman claimed 'Language development is natural whether written or oral. It develops in a social setting because of the human need to communicate and interact with the significant others in the culture' (Goodman 1980: 3). Written language is seen as having the same functions as all other forms of language (listening, speaking) which include the need to inform, to communicate, to interact with others, to learn about the world and so on. In other words, language, whatever its mode, serves a purpose for the learner; young children learn to talk because it is useful and functional for them. So the argument goes that if written language is also seen as functional, then children will learn to produce (write) and understand it (read) in much the same way. And just as oral language is learned without direct teaching, so too written language could be learned without direct intervention. In this country several theorists advocated greater links across the various modes of language and they raised awareness of the power of language as a medium of learning (e.g. Barnes *et al.* 1972, Britton 1972, Barnes 1981, Corden 2000).

The Goodmans (1979) actually assumed that there was only one reading process, that is that all readers, whether beginner/inexperienced or fluent/experienced use the same process, although they differ in the control they have over the process. They assumed a non-stage reading process, in other words. In their view the major advantage experienced readers have over inexperienced ones is their better knowledge of language and of the world. As such, skilled readers, it was thought, relied less on orthographic information.

The teacher's role in this model involves two things: first, creating a climate in which children would be interested in using reading and writing – as Newman (1985) put it, offering 'invitations' to learn – and second, enabling children join the 'literacy club' as Smith (1992). In this view reading development is best fostered through exposure to text that is rich in natural language and through helping the reader attend to meanings and contexts. It is assumed that controlling the vocabulary of texts or attending to parts of words would not pay dividends; that in fact such an approach would limit opportunities for learning.

In this context Wade (1990) debated the inadequacies of the reading schemes of the time in this country, providing an instance from one in which reading in reverse order from line eighteen to line one, rather than from line one to eighteen, appeared to make as much (or as little) sense. He argued that the short sentences, the simple vocabulary and repetition of sounds, words and ideas limited the reader's meaning-making and prediction potential. Similarly Margaret Meek (1988) criticized the disconnective text, the insubstantial characters and the lack of interest or suspense in the train of events in reading schemes, contrasting this with the richness of language and satisfying plots associated with children's literature.

Because reading is seen to develop 'from whole to part, from vague to precise, from gross to fine, from highly concrete and contextualized to more abstract' (Goodman 1986: 39) this perspective on the reading process is often thought of as a 'top-down' model of literacy development. Whole stories are seen as better than sentences and sentences are seen as better than words (Holdaway 1979). Dividing language into smaller and smaller parts or subskills jeopardizes clarity, meaning and simplicity, it is assumed. While the teaching of 'basic language skills' is not ruled out, it is recommended that they are developed within a wider language context which can make vital contributions to the efficiency and organization of the classroom for learning. Both Ann Browne and Teresa Granter stressed this point about integration and sense of purpose in their deliberations about Stephen. In fact both scholars gave this the status of a principle of learning. They spoke about the importance of purpose, relevance and of intrinsic motivation. Ann asked: 'Does he understand what reading is for?' and Teresa's unease about the teacher's affirmations for word accuracy shows her contention that reading and learning are largely based on intrinsic motivation and personal relevance rather than on extrinsic rewards and the proddings of others.

### Principles of whole language and real books in the classroom

Psycho-linguists, such as those noted above, and the literacy scholars and teachers who are persuaded by their thinking, believe that all language is used for authentic purposes and that language, whether oral or written, is best if it is learned for authentic purposes. Whole language refers to the teaching of reading and writing using complete texts in communicative situations, in contrast to skill practice or isolated language drill. The assumption is that the model of acquisition through real use (not through practice exercises) is the best model for developing literacy. This is the way Goodman's popular book *What's Whole in Whole Language* (1986: 24) summed it up for teachers and parents:

Why do people create and learn written language? They need it! How do they learn it? The same way that they learn oral language, by using it in authentic literacy events that meet their needs. Often children have trouble learning written language in school. It's not because it's harder than learning oral language, or learned differently. It's because we've made it hard by trying to make it easy. Frank Smith wrote an article called '12 Easy Ways to Make Learning to Read Hard'. Every way was designed to make the task easy by breaking it up in small bits. But by isolating print from its functional use, by teaching skills out of context and focusing on written language as an end in itself, we make the task harder, impossible for some children.

The key principle is that literacy development should be consistent with language development in general and this means adhering to the following principles in the classroom:

- whole, real functional language;
- authentic speech acts and literacy events;
- ownership for the learner;
- use of literature and other authentic language in reading;
- choice of topics in a wide range of genres for writing;
- integrating language modes i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing;
- integrating language and content in the curriculum;
- building on the language, culture, and experience of learners.

(Goodman 1992)

Frank Smith (1978) summed up the implications for the classroom by identifying two basic necessities for learning to read: the availability of interesting materials that make sense to the learner and an understanding adult as a guide. Margaret Meek (1982: 9) endorsed this stance, saying 'A book, a person and shared enjoyment: these are the conditions of success.'

So the nature of the texts is important (Meek 1988) and so too is the nature of the interaction occurring around texts. The use of texts based on natural language, i.e. real books rather than commercially produced reading schemes or basal readers, is important. One proponent, Liz Waterland (1988), suggested that you can test the suitability of the language by asking whether the book can be read aloud by a fluent reader in a natural manner. In her view the language used should be natural, predictable and meaningful to the child.

In the whole-language classroom, emphasis is placed on empowering the learner. Goodman (1986: 26) expressed it as follows: 'Language development is empowering: the learner "owns" the process, makes the decisions about when to use it, what for and with what results... literacy is empowering too, if the learner is in control with what's done with it'.

Harste (1989: 245) claimed that 'whole language is essentially a theory of voice that operates on the premise that all students must be heard'. And Goodman (1992: 359-60) argued that 'learning is at best diminished and at worst drastically changed when it is controlled by the teacher'. Teachers, he says, should seek to 'mediate' rather than intervene. He exemplified the role of the teacher by suggesting that he or she should discuss book choices with pupils, they should offer a range of ideas to help pupils select writing topics. The teacher is encouraged to promote pupil discussion, to invite the pupils' own ideas and get them to consider possibilities rather than give them an algorithm or a ready-made solution.

In sum, what the psycho-linguists sought to get us away from was the notion – that had prevailed for so long in the development in reading in schools – that reading is a linear process of letter-by-letter deciphering,

sounding out, word recognition and finally text comprehension. It is not a linear process, they insisted, but a meaning-building (constructivist), problem-solving one.

### Interactive activities with authentic texts

A typical day in a whole-language classroom might include work in personal journals, small group discussion of curriculum events, 'quiet time' for reading, 'show and tell', conferences with the teacher or volunteer on recently read or written books, read alouds, and class and group responses to literature. Teresa Grammer and Ann Browne recommended several approaches for Stephen's teacher that fit with the above principles. Typical interactive activities indicative of classrooms committed to whole language and real books would include the following:

- Shared reading experiences through reading of 'big books', i.e. books with print and illustrations large enough to be seen by everyone in a group – originated by Holdaway (1979). This encourages readers to join in reading with the teacher and, as they become familiar with the books, to discuss the illustrations, the contents, the language, etc. This collaborative activity is especially good for modelling reading for beginner readers.
- Hearing children read and sustained silent reading in which the teacher can guide, encourage and facilitate reading development (Campbell 1990).
- Teacher reading stories aloud to the class – this is especially good for developing understanding of how books work and how language works, for learning new words and syntactic structures, and for learning the pleasure of reading (Meek 1988; Fox 2001).
- Literature circles – for example, discussion of one piece of literature that everyone has read; discussion of related texts; discussion of texts from the same genre e.g. mystery stories; the circle may focus on literature by a particular poet or author; discussion of work of a local author who then visits the group; discussion of literature written by class members (Calkins 1986; Harste and Short 1991).
- Literature response activities – book sales involving pupils in creating a commercial to sell a favourite book to the class; pupils to create murals, pictures, paintings, collage, sculpture, mobiles, posters; pupils to perform dramatized versions of the literature or create a puppet show; writing or dramatization of the story to involve the creation of new endings; telling the story from the point of view of one of the characters; journal or letters to be written from the perspective of one of the book's characters; pupils to create a newspaper based on the time period and the happenings in the story; pupils to interview one another about their responses to the story; pupils to research the life of the author (Harste and Short 1991).

- The use of reading and writing workshops (Graves 1983) and the 'author's chair' (Graves and Hansen 1983), conducting writing/reading conferences (Calkins 1991).

The above suggestions are all heavily oriented towards constructing meaning from and responding to literature. Underlying literature-based teaching is the theory of *reader response*. Reading is viewed as a dynamic interaction between the reader and the text. Enjoyment of the reading experience is important and this is prioritized over gathering facts or details from what is read. Traditional teaching of comprehension was largely based on questioning pupils about its literal contents. Teresa Granger wanted Stephen's teacher to focus more on the relationship between the text and his life and less on low-level questions and in this she was drawing on 'reader response theory'. She would encourage teachers to ask pupils questions to explore feelings about the text and to make links between the text and their own lives.

Rosenblatt (1991) proposed the idea that one reads from one or two stances. One stance she called 'aesthetic', which occurs when the reader is focused on what he is living through during the reading event – the reader is attending to the words and to the qualitative overtones of the ideas, images, situations and characters that are being evoked in him as he reads the text. The second stance Rosenblatt described is 'effortful'. This is a stance concerned with the information the reader takes away from the text. These two stances are not mutually exclusive but, according to Rosenblatt, when reading literature the predominant stance should be aesthetic. That is, literature should be read primarily for the enjoyment of the experience. Approaching literature from an effortful stance she says gives the impression that stories should be read for facts and analysis. For this reason she urges teachers to dwell in the experience of reading and to prolong the aesthetic experience through the kinds of activities listed above – drawing, writing, drama, dance and discussion.

Reading in a whole-language classroom would not typically include learning at sound-symbol correspondence for its own sake or using artificial tasks such as worksheets, although mini-lessons may be offered on different aspects of the reading or writing task in order to enable learners to achieve their purpose within the task. Phonics, for example, would not be taught explicitly or systematically. Phonics teaching is usually integrated into meaning-based reading and writing activities and done incidentally as teachers decide it is needed. Whole-language teachers typically provide phonics instruction as part of invented spelling activities. But whole-language theory regards letter-sound relations (which is referred to as graphophonemics) as just one of three cueing systems – the others being semantic/meaning cues and syntactic/language cues.

Teaching of such mini-lessons would be a response to children's needs in relation to an authentic literacy task. Isolating skill sequences is out and

slicing up literacy into grade- or class-appropriate skills, objectives, or outcomes is unacceptable in this model. So too is simplifying texts by controlling their sentence structures and vocabulary, or organizing them around phonic patterns. This view of teaching is in direct contrast to direct instruction or objectives-based instruction which relies on the breaking down of written language into subskills and parts and pre-planning teaching to teach these subskills (Stahl 1997). The problem classic whole-language theorists have with the kind of pre-planned, systematic and subskills-oriented approach is that they think this runs counter to children defining the purposes for their literacy activities. It is thought to disempower the learner.

Before moving to a discussion of the impact of the whole-language movement on classroom practice it is worth noting that our two scholars, while subscribing to the principles of whole language, do not reject the importance of explicit teaching of language skills provided this is done in a way that maintains an emphasis on meaning and understanding of the text. For example, Teresa Granger talked about explicit teaching in a rich context of literacy study. Ann Browne said Stephen needed specific phonic teaching in some aspects and she and Teresa said he needed more sight word training.

### **Influence and impact of the psycho-linguistic perspective**

In England the whole-language or real books approach harks back to the 'language experience' approach that was initiated by the Schools Council Initial Literacy Project known as *Breakthrough to Literacy* (Mackay *et al.* 1978). This initiative emphasized the learner's active engagement in the comprehension and construction of authentic texts and sought to reduce reliance on textbooks. In a sense, therefore, the stage had to some extent been set for the adoption of whole-language practices in schools.

Research on practice, however, revealed that teachers typically did not abandon more traditional methods of teaching reading, including the use of schemes and the teaching of word attack skills and phonic knowledge. But the politicization, during the 1980s and 1990s, of education in general, and of reading in particular, polarized the debate about teaching methods. So you had journalists who were only too eager to suggest that teachers expected pupils to pick up reading in school, without any guidance or structure (Phillips 1990), and others, who should know better, who claimed, on the basis of spurious evidence, that an apparent fall in reading standards was down to the adoption of whole-language methods (Turner 1990). In 1996 an official, but controversial, report on the teaching of reading in inner London schools claimed that the systematic teaching of phonics was a 'significant omission' in practice (Ofsted 1996: para. 16). My recent re-reading of that report and other studies of practice (e.g. DES 1990) convinces me that the principles and practices of whole language were elements of

a broader repertoire of teacher practices that sought to balance direct teaching of word recognition skills with an emphasis on meaning-based approaches through the use of good quality literature. There is no doubt that the principles and procedures associated with whole language impacted on teachers in this country and teachers found the ideas liberating and engaging. Ann Browne and Teresa Granger are especially persuaded by the arguments of this stance on literacy. David Wray, whose interview transcript is presented in the next part of the book, acknowledged its impact on him as a teacher and although he now, like Ann and Teresa, has reservations about aspects of the movement, its ideas undoubtedly resonated with him. Laura Huxford too, as will be demonstrated, draws on psycho-linguistic theory in her interpretation of Stephen's learning needs.

The other side of the Atlantic would seem to have embraced whole language more readily and more exclusively. Commenting on the rapid rise of the whole-language movement in America, David Pearson (1993: 504) said:

Never have I witnessed anything like the rapid spread of this recent movement [whole language] away from mechanistically driven and toward child-centered approaches to teaching reading. Pick your metaphor – epidemic, wildfire, manna from heaven. The movement has spread so rapidly throughout North America that it is a fact of life in literacy curriculum and research.

Some have argued that whole language/real books is both a philosophy and an instructional approach, with the aim of motivating and interesting learners in the process of learning (Bergeron 1990). However, Newman (1985), in contrast, argued that it is not a method of instruction in the conventional sense but that it is a philosophy. Watson (1989) suggested that whole language is difficult to define because most whole-language advocates reject definitions and those who seek definitions, she claims, usually disapprove of the approach in the first place.

To some extent the difficulty associated with definition arises because whole language is perceived as a democratic concept that allows for individual interpretation and variation – it is seen as a concept that is not applied universally; 'it represents local, rather than universal, truth' (Gunderson 1997: 237). In addition, the strong emphasis of psycho-linguists on response to literature, rather than on reading achievement as measured by standardized achievement tests, adds to the difficulty of evaluating it. Response to literature and motivating children to become avid readers are more complex to assess than reading attainment in the more traditional sense of decoding and literal comprehension.

Despite the above definitional difficulties, some researchers have sought to compare whole-language approaches with more traditional methods involving the use of direct instruction and reading schemes and also to assess it

against its own aims. In general it would appear that the results of these studies are mixed, with some showing gains and advantages for whole language and others showing disadvantages (Stahl *et al.* 1994). There is some evidence to suggest that whole-language approaches may have an important function early in the process of learning to read, but that as the child's needs shift, they become less effective (Stahl and Miller 1989). It seems too that the literacy skills tapped by standardized tests take longer to learn in whole-language classes than in more traditional classes (Gunderson 1997).

The psycho-linguistic model certainly placed unprecedented emphasis on motivating learners to become readers and writers. We are familiar with the criticism that, while producing pupils who can read, schools are less good at turning out those who do read. There is sound evidence that a literature-oriented approach promotes children's independent reading as well as their understanding of the story genre (Morrow 1992) and that it fosters the use of comprehension strategies and positive attitudes towards reading (Guthrie *et al.* 2000).

Of particular interest, in my view, is the debate about the impact on minority groups, for example children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Stahl and Miller (1989) found no study involving the latter that particularly favoured whole language. The explanation for the apparent lack of effects favouring whole language with disadvantaged pupils may be that such children may need more than that which whole language provides. Stahl (1999) suggests that children who come from homes where there is a great deal of support for literacy may fare better in whole-language classrooms since these pupils will already have acquired experiences that match the need to make choices in the literacy-rich environments they encounter in school. In contrast, pupils who come from homes where there are few books, where they are not read to, and where alphabet games are not features, may not have the necessary skills to take advantage of the learning opportunities on offer. The assumption here, of course, is that whole-language classrooms exhibit continuity with life in middle-class homes and discontinuity with life in working-class homes.

This thinking also fits with Lisa Delpit's criticisms of indirect or process teaching approaches more generally. She argues (1995) that some pupils are likely to interpret this pedagogy as doing nothing or it may, at best, remain a mystery to them since their expectations of how teachers ought to behave conflict with the facilitative, indirect role that they actually get. It could also be that the high regard that some minority groups have for teachers as powerful authority figures indicates that they rely on and expect direct teaching from their teachers. The logic here is that while whole-language classrooms may well work for middle-class, mainstream pupils, they may not work for culturally and linguistically different pupils because they may have different expectations regarding teacher role. However, I must add



that, intuitively sensible though this line of argument is, I could find no study that provided evidence of this so it must be taken as a hypothesis awaiting refutation or confirmation by research.

The counter-argument here is also compelling. That is that pupils who depend on schools to become literate are probably most in need of authentic literacy experiences. Lots of drill and skill-based activities may well fail to help these pupils to become thoughtful readers, and people for whom reading matters in their lives. Of course this doesn't mean that the opposite is the answer for these pupils (Hiebert 1994). We return to this point later when we explain and discuss 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' models.

### The National Literacy Strategy and a psycho-linguistic perspective

Current literacy policy in England is influenced by the psycho-linguistic perspective discussed above, specifically in its acknowledgement of the various cueing systems that learners need in order to become effective readers. First, a brief introduction to the National Literacy Strategy (NLS).

The NLS was introduced into primary schools in England in 1998, and although it is not legally binding like the National Curriculum, teachers and schools are strongly urged by national policy makers to adhere to it. The vast majority of schools now implement it. Its introduction was controversial as it marked a departure from what had obtained prior to it insofar as teachers up until 1998 could determine what teaching practices and mode of organization to use in the classroom to develop literacy. Its introduction followed more than a decade of debate about supposedly poor standards of literacy in primary schools.

Termly teaching objectives for each year of the primary age range are described in detail in the Strategy. A structure for time and class management of a daily Literacy Hour is specified: it is expected that for at least 60 per cent of the time pupils should be working with the teacher. Three broad elements of literacy are the focus of the Strategy:

- word-level work (phonics, spelling and vocabulary);
- sentence-level work (grammar and punctuation); and
- text-level work (comprehension and composition).

It is clearly stated that successful reading depends on a range of strategies. The 'reading searchlights model' (DfES 2001: 1) describes how each of the four searchlights (phonics knowledge, knowledge of context, grammatical knowledge, and word recognition and graphic knowledge) 'sheds a partial light, but together they make a mutually supporting system' (DfES 2001: 1). It is in this regard, I think, that the psycho-linguistic perspective shows its greatest influence on the NLS.

The Strategy adds that of these approaches, phonic and graphic knowledge should be prioritized. This is not in line with whole-language principles but we return to this in more detail in Part Two when we discuss other evidence made available through the cognitive-psychological school. There are several references to the importance of the application of this knowledge so it is meaningful to the learner and this fits well with the whole-language model, but the fundamental principle of breaking down language into elements to be studied separately from context of application is not consistent with whole language.

The NLS represents quite a different model of literacy pedagogy than that espoused by whole-language theorists. Kenneth Goodman, for instance, had argued that whole language gives teachers the power to make decisions; he said 'It shifts power from teachers' manuals to teachers' (1989: 214). The NLS, in contrast, is highly dependent on manuals, partly explained by the fact that content and teaching are so heavily emphasized. This too is in sharp contrast with whole language – as Yetta Goodman (1989: 114) said, 'The focus of whole-language curriculum is not on the content of what is being studied but on the learner.' She adds that 'this does not minimize the importance of content, rather it represents the belief that content can only be understood and seriously studied when learners are . . . participating in deciding what will be learned.'

Several researchers (e.g. Dombey 1998a, 1998b; Wray 1998; Hall 2001) expressed reservations about various aspects of the NLS, not least the reduction in teacher autonomy and professional judgement that it represented. The scholars interviewed in this part of the book show a similar concern, especially Ann Browne who alerts us to the potential dangers of diverting teachers' attention from children's learning.

Overall the psycho-linguistic perspective had a number of significant influences on the field of reading. Pearson and Stephens (1994), who themselves could not be described as part of the whole-language or real books movement, identify four major influences of the impact of the psycho-linguistic perspective on the field of reading. Although they were referring to the United States, these influences apply equally in this country in my view. In focusing on meaning making, the psycho-linguistic stance on reading encouraged us to value literacy experiences much more than we had in the past. And the past here is not so distant – it is worth reminding ourselves that several official reports of literacy practice in this country during the 1980s had urged teachers to devote more attention to imaginative aspects of reading and texts. For example in 1982, referring to the fact that 5-year-olds were introduced too quickly to published reading schemes, the inspectors stated 'The children spent a good deal of time decoding print with the result that they read mechanically and with little understanding . . .' (DES 1982: 5). This same survey of first schools commented on the unproductive time spent by 50 per cent of the schools on



English exercises which stifled individuality. This despite the fact that as far back as 1975 the Bullock Report had said that 'explicit teaching out of context' is of little value (DES 1975: 172). Official reports in the late eighties (DES 1988, 1989) confirmed the importance of children's literature and their response to literature in the development of the intellect and the imagination. In practice this meant that teachers were more likely to be critical of decontextualized, work-book exercises on specific letter-sound correspondences, syllabification exercises and routine comprehension activities.

Secondly, the whole-language movement made us value texts based on natural language patterns, especially those designed for use with beginner readers, thus enabling emerging readers to draw on their knowledge of language to predict meanings and words. This meant that texts that were based on high-frequency, short words, such as Example 1 below, were no longer so valued and, similarly, those based on phonic elements, such as Example 2 below, became less common.

*Example 1*

Run, John, run.  
Run to Dad.  
Dad will run.  
Run, Dad.  
Run, John.  
See them run.

*Example 2*

Nat can bat.  
Nat can bat with the fat bat.  
The cat has the fat bat.  
The rat has the fat bat.  
Nat has the fat bat.  
Bat the bat, Nat.  
(Pearson and Stephens 1994)

Indeed, current reading schemes in use in this country incorporate texts that to a greater or lesser extent mirror children's literature.

Third, the psycho-linguistic perspective made us more aware and sensitive to children's efforts as readers. As Pearson and Stephens (1994: 29) put it, 'Errors became generative rather than negative' and showed us more of the workings of the child's mind, allowing the teacher and the learner to understand more about the reading strategies being used and not being used. In attending so much to comprehension, it correspondingly de-emphasized pronunciation and recitation. The influence of the psycho-linguistic school of thought in relation to the emphasis on children's reading cueing systems is evident in *English in the National Curriculum* (DFE 1995) and as stated above in the National Literacy Strategy.

One reading researcher in the United States concluded that over the 1980s and early 1990s in the US, there seemed to have been a shift in interest from seeing reading as comprehension to seeing reading as a personal response to quality literature – what he terms 'reading-to-enjoy' rather than 'reading-to-learn'. Referring to what teachers emphasized prior to the psycho-linguistic era, Stahl (1999: 18) claims that this shift is a significant one:

The shift from Reading-to-Learn to Reading-to-Enjoy is a profound one. Whereas the emphasis in the directed reading activity was getting facts from text, first narratives and later expository text, shifting to text-based and reader-based inferences, the emphasis in whole language classes is on response to literature, without assessing any understanding at the literal or inferential level. The result can be that children's discussions wander from the text itself to a discussion of issues around the text.

There is no doubt that reading-to-enjoy is a vital aspect of the psycho-linguistic school. Over the 1980s concerns remained in England about the inadequacy of practices in relation to reading-to-learn, especially in the use of information texts (e.g. DES 1989) and this was an issue that exercised researchers and policy makers that are not so easily located in this school of thought. We take up some of these issues in the next part of the book.

Psycho-linguistic theory helped us appreciate the significance of knowledge of likely linguistic sequences in text – the probabilities of not only letters in words, but also words in sentences, sentences in paragraphs, and larger genres of text. By giving us miscue analysis and by highlighting reading as a constructive process, psycho-linguists gave us, respectively, a means of examining the reading process and a theory of reading that were distinct from previous ideas about reading.

## Note

1. One chair in the classroom is designated as the author's chair and pupils sit in this special chair to share their writing. The focus is on celebrating completed writing projects, not on revising the composition to make it better.